

Talking Points for School Leaders

These talking points are designed for school leaders to use in discussing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act with school staff, parents, community groups and the media.

How is NCLB supposed to help schools improve?

- It aims to reinforce the work we are already doing to set high standards for our students.
- It sets high expectations for all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, family background and/or disability.
- It aims to get all students meeting academic standards and encourages them to reach even higher.
- It emphasizes reading and mathematics.
- The law requires that test results be reported separately for specifically identified sub-groups of students. These subgroups are: various racial and ethnic groups (White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Native American), economically disadvantaged students, students whose first language is not English (ELL), and students with disabilities.
- It helps us to better focus our efforts on those students most in need of assistance.
- The law requires each state to set specific goals for student achievement. In Washington state, we have created the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and aligned our state test, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, to these standards.
- A school makes “Adequate Yearly Progress” – or AYP – when students meet or exceed academic targets. If schools don’t make AYP for two or more years, they are classified as “schools in need of improvement.”
- If Title I schools do not make AYP for two years in a row, parents are given a number of options, including transferring their children to another school within the school district. After three years, parents may access supplemental education services, such as tutoring. The school would cover the cost of these options.
- Every child deserves an excellent teacher, and the law requires that by the 2005 – 2006 school year, every classroom must have a highly qualified teacher in it. This means teachers must be licensed by the state, fully certified and able to demonstrate competence in the subjects they teach.
- Paraprofessionals working in Title I programs or schools must meet new requirements. Beginning this year, all newly hired paraprofessionals must have two years of college or an associate’s degree, and they must demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to assist with reading, writing and mathematics through a formal state or local assessment. Currently employed paraprofessionals have until 2006 to meet these requirements.

What are some of the challenges in meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind?

- NCLB requires that every student across the country achieve state standards in reading and mathematics by 2014. This is a very ambitious goal with a very tight timetable – but it is the right goal.
- Because test results must be reported separately for all groups in the school, if even one group falls below the AYP goal, the school will not be counted as making AYP for that year – even if all the other student groups meet the goal.
- Different students learn in different ways and at different rates, and we must accommodate those differences. We must hold all students to high standards, while recognizing that all will not progress at the same rate. And we must make appropriate provisions for those who are struggling to catch up.
- Unfortunately, the law does not reward progress. Some schools will make outstanding progress and still not meet the AYP goal. It's very important to recognize and applaud the good work going on in those schools, at the same time we help them move up.
- Schools that don't make AYP for two consecutive years are "in need of improvement." Virtually every school can improve, even those at the top, but some need to improve more than others.
- What does it mean to be a school "in need of improvement"? It means that we have to work harder and take specific steps to help that school. This could involve new reading or math programs, more after-school assistance, new curricula or teacher training, depending on students' needs. It does not mean that drastic changes will be made without parents knowing about them or having input on them.
- Helping schools in need of improvement will take resources, but, in fact, we don't expect to get a lot of new resources. This means we will have to do the best we can with what we have, targeting our resources as carefully as possible to the areas of greatest need.
- Your children are in good hands. First of all, they have great families. Second, we have many talented, well-qualified teachers. Many of them are outstanding, even though some – technically – may not meet the federal law's definition of "highly qualified." Our challenge will be to keep our outstanding teachers, to see that teachers not yet meeting this requirement get the training or certification they need and to recruit new highly qualified teachers.

How can this law help us build on our school's success?

- Before we turn to test scores, we need to take just a minute to highlight some significant events in our school this year. Most people understand very well that while test scores are very important, they don't capture everything that goes on in school.
 - INSERT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS HERE – increased promotion/graduation rates; awards received by the school, teachers or students; decreased dropout rates; reduced class size; fewer suspensions; new course offerings or curriculum work; new programs or grants; parent or community involvement, etc.
- Our parents play a crucial role in our schools. They are invaluable assets to our schools and to their children's success in school. Many of you spend time in our schools, providing help and resources that we otherwise would not have. We appreciate you more than you know.
- How did our students do this year?
 - FOR SCHOOLS MEETING AYP GOALS: We're extremely proud that our school has met [or exceeded] the goals that have been set. We know our teachers and students will build on this solid achievement and continue to move ahead.

- FOR SCHOOLS MAKING GOOD PROGRESS BUT STILL NOT MEETING AYP GOALS: Our school has made terrific progress this year, but unfortunately, we still fall short of the AYP goals. We applaud this progress, even as we continue to work hard to move ahead.
- FOR SCHOOLS MEETING AYP WITH AVERAGE SCORES, BUT WITH SUBGROUPS BELOW AYP GOALS: Our school's average score meets the AYP goals, but scores for some specific groups of students did not. This means there are groups of students we are not reaching, and we need to do better by them.
- FOR SCHOOLS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT OVERALL: Our school has been identified as needing school improvement because [cite specific reasons]. We believe all of our students are up to the task set by NCLB and we are going to do everything that we can to get them there.
 - Here's how we plan to do that: DESCRIBE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS HERE, INCLUDING NEW CURRICULA, NEW PROGRAMS, SMALLER CLASS SIZES, AFTER-SCHOOL HELP, ETC. DO NOT OVERWHELM WITH DETAILS. OFFER 3-5 KEY ITEMS YOU KNOW PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT.

What can the community do to help?

- Our school belongs to this community, and we need the help of the entire community to improve it. Everyone has a role to play in helping all of our children to succeed.
- Please think about the organizations and groups you may be involved in, such as your places of worship, your employer, your membership groups and consider ways they might get involved in helping our schools. We can provide suggestions for how they might get involved. We need their help.
- Parents have a special job to do. Yes, we need and would love to have more parents volunteer in our school. And we hope that many of you will get more involved. But we know that's not always possible for busy parents.
- Parent involvement at home is probably the most important kind of parent involvement in education, and there are many things parents can do – and all parents should do – for their children, including:
 - Provide a quiet place to do homework.
 - Make sure they get a good night's sleep and a good breakfast.
 - Take an interest in their schoolwork and talk with them about it.
 - Teach them respect for others and responsibility for their own behavior.

Conclusion

- We have some big challenges ahead of us, as you can see.
- We believe we could do more for our students with more resources, but resources are limited right now. Unless the budget situation improves, we are not likely to have more resources any time soon. But rest assured that we will be doing everything we can to focus the resources we have where they will be used to the greatest good.
- Our doors are open to the community. We invite you in; we want you to be involved. These children are your children, too, and they need your support.
- We want to hear from you – not just about your concerns but also your ideas about how to make our schools better. School improvement must be a two-way conversation between those of us who work in the schools and those who live and work in our community.
- With your help and involvement, we can get all of our students where they need to be.